Theresa Williams September 24, 2010

Certain images can be quite ambiguous, for instance some of you may not have noticed about the image below that one man is mentally disabled and the other is an esteemed doctor. They are both clearly trying to get the public to look at them, but in a way so they can see the similarities of them and all people. This image is reflective of Garland-Thomson’s and Linton’s theory in that it invites people to stare at the person and challenges the public to see the similarities between a person with disabilities and a person who is not disabled, and to make them understand that they aren’t that different. In the same way instead of seeing the disabled person as a lesser individual, meaning can be reassigned. Instead of labeling them as doctor and patient, see them as two equal individuals. This picture wants people to look, stare and understand that although some individuals are disabled they are not “different” in the sense that all of us are silly and human, whether a patient or doctor.

The image of two men wearing funny glasses is not seen often, it clearly will attract attention and provoke curiosity. Looking at the picture you see two men about the same age standing next to each other; one is wearing glasses with a big fake nose and bushy eyebrow and mustache, this man is shorter and heavier, with clothing more rumpled. The other man has glasses with fake eyeballs on springs hanging out from the fake glasses; he is taller with a well-trimmed white beard and well dressed in casual clothing. They are both smiling and having fun and seem to have a good relationship.

The context of this depiction is an intriguing element of its representation and reveals its effectiveness of how it is used. It takes place in front of a door in the office of the doctor. It is posed yet seems to be spontaneous and seems to reflect a natural moment in the relationship between the two men. Their humor seems genuine, and there is a comfort and playfulness in the way they are juxtaposed. An easy interaction is portrayed that emphasizes the equality and similarity between them. The hierarchical nature of the doctor-patient relationship is not in evidence. The illustration is selected to embody the work of an agency that serves the disabled population.

When you take a step back, you will notice the image is in a brochure for Easter Seals: Disability Services. This brochure is promoting the services they provide for the disabled community and their supporters and staff. This is showing people the benefits of this non-profitable organization and the caring staff they employ. Easter Seals provide services for people with disabilities and their families so that they have equal opportunities to live, learn, work, and play in their communities. The brochure represents the mission and methods of the agency. It emphasizes the knowledge of some of the services of the organization. The audience is the supporters of and donators to Easter Seals as well as the patients and members of the disabled community and their families.

We are drawn to the figures depicted here; we stare, laugh, and wonder at how the two people are together. Easter Seals wants us to gaze and reflect on how a disabled person can seem as “normal” as any other. It validates their mission in minimizing differences and endorsing equality. Our staring is encouraged and hopefully we recognize a mutuality and humanity that belies the clear differences of the role and functioning of these two men in society.

Garland-Thomson believes staring can be a gateway to mutual recognition and understanding of those different from you. This image attracts attention and provokes interest that creates staring. Staring helps people see the similarities and normalness of the disabled. Garland-Thomson says, “…staring strives toward knowing by reducing unfamiliarity...” (205). You have to look hard and understand that one man is disabled and one man is a doctor. This illustration creates familiarity and shows the connection between the man and his doctor, so that people understand that they aren’t separate from us. Garland-Thomson believes that staring can have a positive effect on the starer if it creates an empathic stance and helps them acknowledge the distinctive characteristics of the disabled.

Linton’s expresses that the term disabled should have a less stigmatizing affect on the disabled community. The term should have new meaning that has the voice of the disabled community. The disabled client here is not differentiated from the doctor. The public views someone with a disability as someone who is suffering from a condition they can’t control and therefore need us to define them as patients. Linton disagrees with this and the picture supports her views. In this picture the disabled person is not “less than” and does not demand our intervention. Linton argues that we should “examine the nondisabled privilege and power. It is not the neutral, universal position from which disabled people deviate...” (235). The doctor allows himself to be seen in the same light as the disabled person as if to acknowledge that the person with disabilities is not part of a deviant group but of a different and equal category of people. However there is inadvertent duplicity within the context of the picture that shows the need of the medical community to help the disabled. The image suggests an equality that is not the reality behind the picture because it is in a doctor’s office. The disabled person is a patient, which reinforces the medical definition of disability. The picture attempts to reassign meaning even as it is in the context of a medical model. However we are all patients even doctors can be patients and in that way validates that we all have differences within our similarities.

This image helps to disintegrate the duality of disabled and able-bodied individuals; everyone can be fun, impromptu, and express themselves as human equals. The disabled person cannot be distinguished from a doctor when they are seen in a light that minimizes their differences. It reflects Garland-Thomson’s theory by inviting people to stare so that they may come to understand the contentment and fullness of life that disabled people can attain. This also represents Linton’s theory as it challenges people to reassign meaning to disabled as similar and silly and human, not a different, deviant group. However this image and the context of it in the brochure for Easter Seals: Disability Services is somewhat duplicitous in that it wants disabled people to have the same rights and opportunities as everyone, but it implies that they need the help of doctors and organizations such as Easter Seals to achieve this. Finding their place in the world is a complex challenge for people with disabilities, it is critical that not disabled people can recognize the rights and value of including the group of disabled people as part of humanity.



Bibliography

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